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SUBJECT Communists in Central America

ROBERT PIERPOINT: The Reagan Administration has begun a major drive to convince the public that the Communists are coming in Central America. More on that after this.

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PIERPOINT: The first of what is scheduled to be a series of briefings was held yesterday on Soviet-Cuban penetration of Central America. It was an impressive affair, with the central Intelligence Agency's articulate Deputy Director, Admiral Bobby Inman, in charge of the show. The several experts gave evidence of a strong Soviet-Cuban military buildup in Nicaragua. The evidence included a number of pictures of military bases under construction and military equipment in and around the bases, pictures taken by U.S. reconnaissance aircraft. They seemed to prove fairly conclusively that the Nicaraguans, with the help of hundreds of Cubans and a few Soviet advisers, are building a lot of military bases for a small country. They also seem to prove the Reagan Administration's point that Cuba and the Soviet Union are supplying the Nicaraguans with much more military equipment than they might need for normal defensive purposes, including scores of heavy Soviet tanks, hundreds of trucks, and dozens of big howitzers and antiaircraft guns. The Soviets are also helping build or improve some airfields in Nicaragua that the U.S. officials believe will be used by Soviet-supplied MIG jet fighters and flown by some 50 Nicaraguan pilots now being trained in Communist countries.

The intelligence experts admit they don't know for sure just why the Nicaraguans and their Communist allies are doing all this, but they strongly imply that it is to turn the left-leaning Sandinista government in Managua into a totalitarian regime similar

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to Cuba, and then to spread Communist influence throughout Central America. The Nicaraguans claim they are simply building up their defenses against the United States, which has invaded and occupied them twice in this century, and against neighboring Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, all of which have governments that are certainly anti-Sandinista.

Briefings later this week, and perhaps the next, are to take up charges by Secretary Haig and others that Nicaragua is not only building itself a strong pro-Communist military machine, but that it is also the main channel of military supplies moving into the hands of the guerrillas in El Salvador. Haig has also said the revolution in El Salvador is under the command and control of foreigners. He has not said exactly who outside the country. He has not said exactly where. But the thrust of yesterday's briefing and others to come later clearly imply that Nicaragua, Cuba and the Soviet Union are the guilty parties.

If that is the case, the real question is what the Reagan Administration intends to do about it. And so far, no briefings are scheduled to answer that.